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Including pride and its group-based, relational, and contextual features in theories of contempt

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Abstract: Sentiment addresses emotional and enduring attitudinal features of contempt, but explaining contempt as a mixture of basic emotion system affects does not adequately address the family resemblance structure of the concept. Adding forms of individual, group-based, and widely shared arrogance and contempt is necessary to address complex mixed feelings of proud superiority when “looking down on” and acting harshly towards others.

When Hume (1739/2001) wrote about moral emotions, he argued: “Contempt or scorn has such a strong tincture of pride, that there scarce is any other passion discernible” (p. 249). According to Norton (2001), Hume argued that contempt is “a mixture of hatred and pride arising from the experience of the negative features of another person” (p. 161). Although it might be argued that the folk affect concept of contempt has changed markedly since the 18th century, a more parsimonious explanation is that pride is an important omission from Gervais & Fessler’s (G&F’s) Attitude–Emotion–Scenario (AES) model.

Claiming that pride is part of the complex family resemblance (Wittgenstein 1953/2001) of conceptual relations means examining the criteria for ascribing contempt and pride in contrast to (and excluding) their respective opposites of respect and humility. Moreover, pride, anger, and disgust should be included in the family resemblance structure of contempt because these are manifestations of a devaluation of *and* sense of superiority over other individuals and groups. It is important to clarify that pride is not discussed here as a form of positive self-evaluative emotion based upon “authentic” personal achievements recognized by others (Tracy & Robins 2007). Rather, it is “hubristic pride” (Tracy & Robins 2007), which suggests a lack of concern for others (e.g., opponents) when celebrating one’s achievements, abilities, or affiliations and a tendency towards self-aggrandizement and arrogance. Depending upon the context, intensity (Holbrook et al. 2014), and repetition of such displays, a consistently arrogant stance when comparing oneself with or simply relating to others tends to be associated

with the type of description of a “proud man” discussed by Hume (1739/2001). The account of proud arrogance and aloof or “cold” superiority and anger or disgust advocated here is therefore consistent with a dispositional negative character of a contemptuous person. However, *pace* G&F I argue that expressions of disgust, anger, and arrogant pride form a family resemblance structure of complex similarities and differences, which allows these quite distinct discrete emotions to be examined *as manifestations of* a superior or devaluating attitude towards another person or group.

On my account, both “hot” and “cold” forms of arrogant pride should be included in G&F’s analysis of contempt. Similar but limited recognition of a role for pride is acknowledged in Fischer and Giner-Sorolla’s (2016) competing analysis of contempt as a dynamic emotion. Fischer and Giner-Sorolla present contempt as a complex mix of emotions, expressive behaviours experienced, and actions during interactions with others that potentially varies from laughter to hate, but people do not tend to vacillate between contempt and more positive emotions. Both analyses rightfully emphasise that contempt is about the other person or group and their lack of worth and only implicitly about one’s superiority. However, pointing out that a person is expressing contempt or enjoys dominating and demeaning others (e.g., as an individual or on behalf of group) might, of course, be experienced as identifying the person’s conduct as shameful; that is, unless the context is one in which the contemptuous person’s prestige or status reflects individual or group-based power as well as the confidence and certainty that criticism of his or her sentiment can be easily rebuffed.

Such contexts indicate the importance of group-based individual and even widely shared collective emotional forms of relational emotions (Sullivan, 2014). By including pride in the AES model, we can see how complex interpersonal relations are important in contexts in which imbalances of power are maintained between individuals. For example, it is not always that case that pride is a matter of one’s superiority over others or that the grounds for arrogance reside solely in the deficiencies, errors, or weaknesses of other persons or groups. The appraised lower value of others and perceptions based upon social appraisals such as being influenced by the contempt of influential group leaders and perpetuated by propaganda, disinformation, and a lack of meaningful intergroup contact.

Evidence for complex mixed and group-based combinations of contempt with other emotions is demonstrated by Becker et al.'s (2011) finding that negative outgroup-directed anger and contempt was experienced simultaneously with positive self-directed emotions (which included personal pride) as a result of engaging in collective action. Moreover, as Bar-Tal et al. (2007) have outlined with respect to intractable conflicts, emotions like anger and disgust towards other groups may become part of a background collective emotional orientation of a given society. Occasions of group pride that are widely shared and form a background to individual group-based expressions or internalizations of contempt for others are therefore worth incorporating into the AES model, even if only to identify how the rehumanisation of devalued others occurs and contempt expressed towards individuals and groups is overcome, in some cases, by the actions of the "targets" of the sentiment themselves. If such reconciliation is impossible, then contempt may indeed signal that the other person (or group) is individually or socially "appraised as unworthy or inferior and the relation as beyond reconciliation" (van der Löwe & Parkinson 2014:130).

In this commentary, I argued that contempt has a family resemblance conceptual structure with multiple overlapping criteria. Hubristic or arrogant pride should be analysed as part of the conceptual relations of contempt with disgust and anger. The enduring interactional and relational features of the proud or arrogant individual who "looks down upon" other individuals or groups also should be included in a manner that can address G&F's focus on sentiment as a combination of basic affect mixtures and enduring attitudes. In the right context, diverse expressive and performative behaviour such as a lip curl, laughter, or indifference can be interpreted as individual, group-based, or even widely shared collective forms of contempt. Scenarios in which a person might feel completely justified and certain in their devaluation of another person or group therefore require close attention to matters of identity and power. This may include certainty of the inferiority of an individual or collective other that renders reconciliation (or mutual recognition) unlikely and reflects a background group moral ethos that is reinforced by social appraisals of the contempt towards a given target displayed by individuals or groups that the appraiser does respect.

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